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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

5 April 1985

WHAT IF ARAFAT ACCEPTED UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 242?

Summary

Acceptance of UNSC Resolution 242 by Yasir Arafat would throw Middle Eastern politics into disarray and greatly complicate the US position in the region. In our view, such an Arafat move would not dramatically improve prospects for achieving an Arab-Israeli peace in the short-to mid-term. [redacted]

Moderate Arabs would expect the US to apply quick and heavy leverage with Israel. Tel Aviv would be put in a difficult quandary, but would strongly resist US pressure. Israel's fragile National Unity Government and the overwhelming majority of the public would not be able to change quickly deeply engrained, hostile attitudes toward Arafat and the PLO. [redacted]

Radical Palestinians and Syria would step up efforts to derail the peace process through terrorism and military intimidation of Jordan. Some Arafat loyalists in Fatah might be driven to join forces with the radicals. King Hussein would likely withdraw from the peace process if he felt Jordanian security was jeopardized by attacks from Syria and the radical Palestinians. [redacted]

Over time, however, possibilities for diplomatic movement might arise, particularly if continued PLO moderation stirred a serious public debate in Israel. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted]
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Why It Won't Help Now

We believe that because of current circumstances in the region, even Arafat's acceptance of UN Resolution 242 would not lead quickly to resumption of negotiations nor nearterm progress toward achievement of an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. [REDACTED]

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The PLO. The PLO is deeply split between Syrian-abetted radicals and Arafat-led moderates who look to Jordan and other moderate states. The radicals would see Arafat's acceptance of 242 as the ultimate betrayal of the Palestinian cause. They would seize on the issue to attempt to discredit Arafat among all Palestinians and target him and his principal lieutenants for assassination. [REDACTED]

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Even within his own Fatah organization, Arafat's acceptance of 242 would provoke serious factionalism. It would likely alienate Arafat from such key supporters as Faruq Qaddumi and Salah Khalaf and might lead them to link up with the radical camp. [REDACTED]

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Syria. The Syrians would step up their efforts to derail PLO-Jordanian coordination. They would support and aid the efforts of Palestinian radicals to assassinate Arafat, his aides, and probably target King Hussein as well. Jordan might also be subject to Syrian military intimidation. [REDACTED]

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Jordan. Jordan's reaction to Arafat's acceptance of Resolution 242 would be heavily influenced by the context of Arafat's move. If Arafat's acceptance were done in tandem with the King's own plans for advancing the peace process, Amman would welcome the move. But Amman probably would be dismayed if Arafat made a premature, uncoordinated decision. However unlikely, Hussein would be concerned that Washington might turn to Arafat to work out the details for negotiations with Israel and thereby reduce Hussein's role as key intermediary in the Middle East peace process. [REDACTED]

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We believe, moreover, that King Hussein would withdraw from the process if he believed Jordan's security were being jeopardized. The King's senior advisers have long argued against Jordan risking its hard-won stability for the Palestinians and would press Hussein to end his participation if Jordanian interests increasingly came under attack from Syria or Syrian-sponsored Palestinian radicals. [REDACTED]

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Israel. Tel Aviv's reaction would be the most crucial--and here again the confluence of circumstances works against prospects for early progress. We doubt strongly that Arafat's acceptance of 242 would be enough by itself to change the Israeli consensus against the PLO. Likud and other hardliners--like a majority of the Israeli public--would see Arafat's move as a grudging gesture designed to open a dialogue with the US and ultimately to foster United States pressure on Israel for

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far-reaching territorial and other concessions. The National Unity Government is too fragile, balanced between Labor and Likud, to be able to respond positively. Herut hardliners in Likud would refuse to consider any territorial compromise in the West Bank--probably even in exchange for a full peace--as would other coalition hawks, including a significant number even within Labor. []

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Prime Minister Peres would have the option of using Arafat's move to split up the coalition and to try to reconstitute it without Herut. He knows, however, that such a course opens him to inevitable charges from the hardliners that he is endangering Israeli security--charges that would find strong acceptance among many Israelis who would continue to nourish deep suspicions of the prospects for serious negotiations leading to an equitable and abiding peace. Peres's reluctance to split the coalition would be deepened by fear that Arafat in the end could speak only for himself and not the PLO as a whole. Peres also would fear that negotiations would lead to pressures for concessions that would be wrenching for Israeli society. He also recognizes that the substantive differences between him and even the most moderate PLO members--and Jordan--are so wide on central issues like the extent of West Bank territorial compromise and the status of Jerusalem that a successful outcome for negotiations would be unlikely at best. []

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In our view, Israel's most likely response would be to temporize. It would likely call for further PLO concessions before considering it an acceptable negotiating partner. Tel Aviv might demand, for example, Arafat's explicit recognition of Israel's right to exist, revocation of the clauses in the PLO charter that call for Israel's replacement with a "democratic, secular state," and renunciation of terrorism--and would require Arafat to ensure PLO compliance with these conditions over time as a test of good faith. []

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Everybody Looks to Washington

Arafat's acceptance of 242 would create highly unrealistic PLO and Arab expectations of dramatic action by the US. Arafat, Jordan, Egypt, and other moderate Arab states would expect Washington quickly to open a dialogue with the PLO, accept it as an eligible participant in peace negotiations, and pressure Tel Aviv for major concessions. They would expect the US to obtain an Israeli freeze on West Bank settlement activity prior to the beginning of any negotiations and ultimately to gain Israel's agreement to remove most existing Israeli settlements and to withdraw from most of the West Bank as part of a peace settlement. []


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The Israelis would anticipate US pressure of some sort and would fear the development of serious strains in bilateral relations. Nevertheless, any Israeli government would feel compelled to "stand up" to the US, both to demonstrate resolve to


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the Israeli public and to avoid whetting Arab appetites for further concessions. In this effort, the Israelis would look to their supporters in Congress and among the US public to limit the pressure that the US government could bring to bear. 

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Over the longer term, possibilities for US diplomacy might arise, particularly if Arafat responded positively to some of the Israeli demands. Such action by Arafat would likely stir growing debate in Israel and provide avenues for the US to work actively with Israel and the Arab parties. Despite whatever disappointment moderate Arabs felt over US inability to "deliver" Israel quickly, they would continue to encourage the US to seize opportunities presented by the debate in Israel to influence Israeli decisionmaking. 

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